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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OVIP](#) [ELAB](#) [PINR](#) [UNGA](#) [UNSC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN PRESIDENT TRAVELS TO SAUDI ARABIA -- AGAIN

REF: A. ABUJA 1475 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. ABUJA 1645 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty
for reasons in Sections 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Nigerian President Yar'Adua traveled again to Saudi Arabia September 22, apparently for medical reasons. This trip, the second to Saudi Arabia within three months (ref A), replaces his scheduled visit to New York for the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

[1](#)2. (C) Presidential Special Advisor on Media and Publicity Olusegun Adeniyi announced September 21 that President Yar'Adua would travel to Saudi Arabia at the invitation of King Abdullah to witness the opening of the Abdullah University of Science and Technology. Foreign Ministry (MFA) North and Central America Director Toyin Solaja confirmed to PolOff September 22 that Yar'Adua traveled to Saudi Arabia and would not attend the UNGA, leaving Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe (who is already in New York) leading Nigeria's delegation.

COMMENT

[1](#)3. (C) This is the second year in a row that Yar'Adua has not attended the UNGA. Last year, he was also in Saudi Arabia on medical treatment. This year, the MFA had indicated in early summer that Yar'Adua would be going. However, his passing up the opportunity to attend the POTUS Africa lunch, engage with regional leaders, and promote Nigerian candidacy for a rotating seat on the UN Security Council make the Saudi trip's timing inauspicious. Media commentators said the presidential statement represented a ruse for Yar'Adua's health problems and a medical visit. Public universities remain on a three-month strike here (Ref B), while Nigeria's President inaugurates an academic institution abroad -- an irony not lost on the Nigerian public. With Yar'Adua's health limiting his ability to handle long international and regional trips, his lack of attendance at this year's UNGA further underscores Nigeria's lack of leadership on key issues and at key fora. END COMMENT.

SANDERS